



**Conflict, Preventing the Draining of the Dread Zuyder Zee, Is to Blame for the Latest Flood in the Stricken Wonderland of Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates—
How the Nation's Ancient Enemy Reaps Its Harvest of Death.**

HOW many more days and nights of terror, death and devastation are in store for Holland? How many more grim gales from the northwest will sweep the waters of the Atlantic into the North Sea, pile them in raging mountains upon the fragile coast and burst the towering dykes in every direction?

"Turn the ocean loose on them, Lord, and doom them to destruction," was the curse the Spaniards of the dark ages called down on this "land of the heretics," and even in the present year of grace and enlightenment, 1916, the results asked for in the curse are being effected.

Picture the night of January 13 last, when the terrific gale that had been raging many days came to a climax of fury; first the moaning, blood-curdling song of the waves, the rumble and crash of thunder and the roar of the onslaught on the dykes; then the snapping and tearing as the sea wall gave way, and the shrieking of the



The war is to blame for what happened on the night of January 13. It stopped the work on the plan to drain the Zuyder Zee, a project agitated for many years and just about to be started. This body of water runs far inland in the shape of a great bay. It was born in the deluge of the thirteenth century and is always the point where the ocean pours through. The menacing festiveness of the Zee extends even to times of calm. It is a matter of constant fighting to keep its water from intruding still further. It is a shallow body, the average depth being probably not more than twelve feet, fortunately for the proposed engineering task. Along the line where it joins the sea, a distance of twenty-five miles, it is planned to erect a great dike that will be 230 feet wide. This bulwark will cost fourteen million dollars, exclusive of draining the Zee after it has been shut off from the outer water. The work would have been started only for the outbreak of the war.

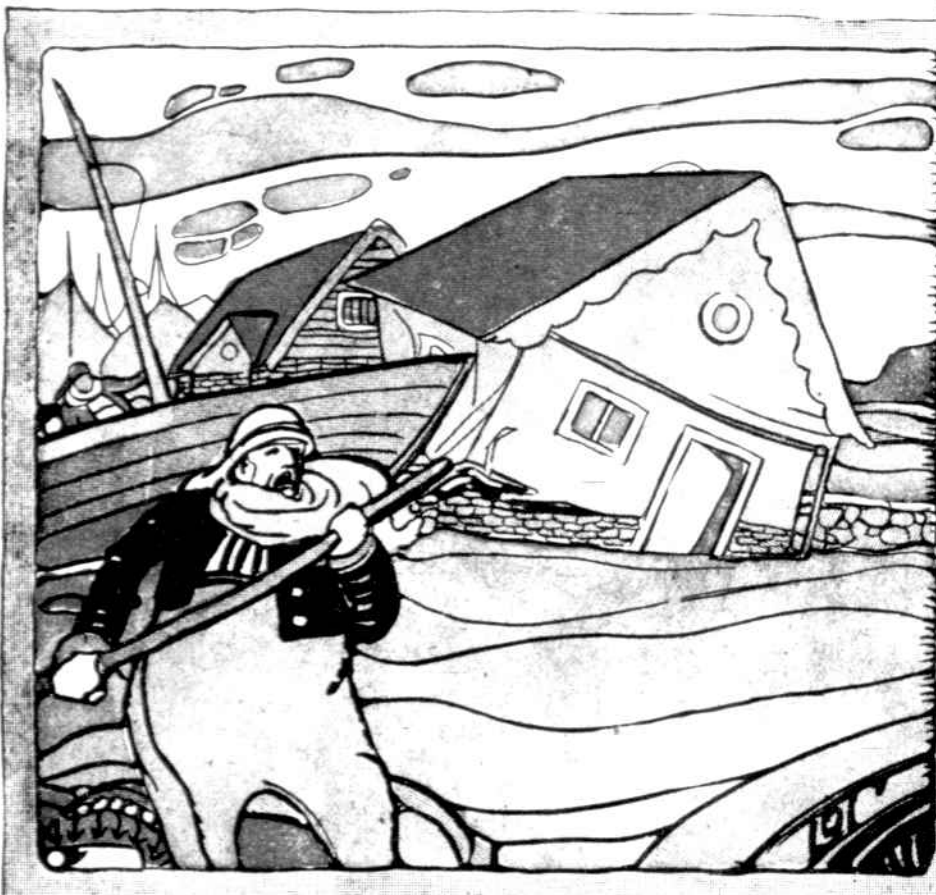
The execution of the project will not only relieve Holland of one of its worst menaces, but will give the nation a stretch of arable land totaling one-fourteenth of all the soil now available. It covers a region almost as large as Rhode Island, and prior to the fateful year of 1273, when continual gales lashed the North Sea into it, it was a section of melancholy marshes interspersed with dry, hard land dotted with hundreds of towns and villages. When the sea swept in thousands of lives were lost.

The Zuyder Zee, however, was not made a permanent resting place for the salt waters until 1419, when the sea broke in again, scouring out the region and leaving it practically as it stands today.

The greatest floods in the subsequent history of Holland, occurring in 1530, 1717, 1856, 1876 and the present one, all had their inception at the Zuyder Zee. The gales sweep the water into the bay, where it is lashed into fury with no outlet except through the dykes. The strength of the storm is concentrated here, and the engineer is at a loss to create a wall strong enough to withstand it. The attack on the dykes along the coast wall is spread evenly, so that no one point receives all the force, and this is what will be accomplished for the dykes of the Zuyder Zee when they are moved out to the North Sea.

It was at the Zuyder Zee that the Spaniards called down their curse on the Netherlands. This was in the sixteenth century, when the dykes of the Zee were deliberately blasted open by the "heretics" as a last and successful resort to save the city of Alkmaar from the armies of Spain led by the dread Duke of Alva.

Spain, then in her heyday, was the most powerful nation in the world. Her troops had overrun Holland and turned the whole country into a charnel house. The duke considered it necessary that a blood-torrent should flow constantly in



storm gods as the ocean poured over the stricken land. Rain drove down in torrents. It was a scene of elemental madness, illuminated blindingly by flashes of lightning.

The country far and wide was converted into an angry sea. The steeples of churches, built on high ground, rose like the masts of sunken ships. Whole communities, villages, farms and cattle were swept out of existence. Men, women, children, oxen, dogs and sheep were everywhere struggling in the water. The swirling sea tore up graveyards and the living baby in its crib floated side by side with the corpse in its coffin. On the tops of trees, clinging to the lofty steeples of churches, huddled on the upper side of floating houses, human beings were clustered praying, cursing, crying.

The ancient floods in which lives were lost by tens of thousands seemed about to be renewed, despite the work of modern engineers and the better organization for help, despite the telegraph and telephone and the railway service. It seemed as if the watery chaos out of which the Netherlands had been created was about to come back into its own. Big coast vessels were swept over the dykes and floated up into the country, where they beat to pieces the walls and roofs of houses.

The big dykes, formed of concrete and cement with great ribs of steel and iron, were snapped like threads. Not even the terrible deluges of the twelfth, thirteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and eighteenth centuries had excited so much terror.

The dykes were smashed in seven places—close to Rotterdam in North Brabant, at Amersfoort, Nykerk, along the Ellem river, near the fortresses of Muiden and Naarden and in the region of Ann-Paulowna. These places are all in the province of North Holland. The devastation that befell this section was the worst, except for the number of lives lost, in the history of the Netherlands for the last five centuries. It was equalled only by the St. Elizabeth flood in 1421, when 10,000 vanished, probably swept out to sea and 100,000 others were found dead.

As the storm began to subside, boats manned by the government troops were sent out in every direction, saving those who were still struggling in the water, picking fugitives from roofs and tree tops and collecting the bodies of the dead. The reserve army was mobilized in a day and, with the regulars, is still working feverishly to repair the broken dykes before the next northwestern storms them.



order that "Holland's rivers of gold, a yard deep," as he phrased it, should be diverted to irrigate the thirsty soil of Spain. The death-knell tolled hourly in every village and surviving fugitives wandered over the country, ghosts of their former selves.

The tide of human life that was ebbing hourly away seemed to have killed the spirit of the nation—until William, Prince of Orange, known as "The Silent," finally threw down the gauntlet. Daring, swift, secret, tireless, this powerful and patient leader was ready to go to any extreme, even to making an ally out of the country's ancient enemy, the sea, in order to sweep the Spaniard forever out of the Netherlands.

It meant that there would be a frightful loss of life and property and that the harvest would be doomed to destruction; but at any rate the Spaniards would have to fly from the North Province or perish to a man. Alkmaar would be saved, and time would be gained for the country to mobilize its motley but grim and determined army.

The result is history. Sufficient has already been accomplished for the glory of Spanish arms, vaunted Alva. Neither honor nor loyalty, he decided, required that sixteen thousand of his soldiers should be sacrificed in a struggle, not with man, but with the ocean, and accordingly the troops were given the word to flee.

This, however, was the only time in history that Holland was able to turn its eternal foe into a friend, though it now has what is known as a defensive inundation system, which it has not yet been called upon to use. Another frightful loss of life and property and destruction of harvests will result if it ever is necessary for the country to open its so-called "war dykes" to destroy an invading army, but heroic measures for defense must be taken by the little, rich nation that would otherwise fall an easy prey to any one of its larger neighbors.

The people of Holland live in constant terror. The menace of their ancient enemy is over them always. And to a certain extent they seem reconciled. The people run to strapping men and women, and the young girls are beauties and charmers in the humbuggery of their quaint costumes and wooden shoes, which are donned for the benefit of tourists who seem to expect to find them in a so-called "native garb." They have a beautiful complexion and bonny eyes—charming as so many Alices in Wonderland, but the promise of beauty in adolescence is scarcely ever fulfilled in maturity.

Their land really is a wonderland. The magic of white sails floating off in the distance through the foliage of a processional forest is ever fresh. This is the country of Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates, a region of lazy landscapes, old world windmills and picturesque little cities. The tragic romance of its eternal battle with the sea is a world sorrow.